GOAL ORIENTED

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Biblical critics attempt to explain the story of Yoseph and his brothers with such crass terms as jealousy and hatred. They imagine a dysfunctional family dynamic involving pettiness and backstabbing. Yoseph is cloaked in the assimilative robes of an Egyptian viceroy seeking vengeance against his brothers. The brothers are presented as ineffective pawns mercilessly manipulated by Yoseph's questionable motives. Yakov is beside himself with grief and his advanced age has taken its toll on his effectiveness. He can no longer be counted on to take charge and make courageous decisions. He is elderly, feeble, and broken. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The brothers were not petty; Yoseph was not vindictive; and Yakov remained strong and effective until his dying day.

It is important to reiterate that the stories of Bereishis were selected from over 2000 years of history. Therefore, it would be foolish to conclude that they simply tell the early history of our forefathers. The stories must be far more profound and revealing than the simple quality of their story line. Just as the other four Books of the Torah were written as notes on a far more extensive and complex lecture reflecting a complementary oral tradition (R.S.R. Hirsch) so too the presented "Biblical stories" are but the enticing trailers to the true stories that are found unabridged in the oral tradition. Besides, why would the "authors" of the Torah have begun our national history with such ignoble and questionable figures?

As explained by all the commentaries, Yoseph's conflict with his brothers involved the immediate destiny of the Jewish nation and the future of humanity. Yoseph was intended to be the "Mashbir - the provider" (42:6) who would protect the family of Yakov from the assimilative influences of the outside world until it had grown into a nation. Once the family had become a nation G-d could reveal His intentions and purposes for creating the universe and populating it with free willed humans. G-d could then give the Torah to the Children of Israel. Therefore, the story of Yoseph's sale to Egypt is the story of Revelation and humanities redemption from the destructive ignorance of paganism.

This week's Parsha opens with the confrontation between Yehudah and Yoseph. At the end of last week's Parsha Yoseph had successfully framed Binyamin for the theft of his special chalice. Shocked, dismayed, and incredulous, Yehudah and the brothers return to Egypt to confront the charges.

Why? Why did Yehudah allow the family to return to the clutches of the untrustworthy, paranoid,

and delusional Viceroy? Why didn't he fight off the limited forces that Yoseph had dispatched to chase them down and escape with the entire family back to Yakov? Binyamin was with them; Shimon was once again among them, so why risk returning to the center of the city and the clutches of the evil Viceroy?

Rashi on Pasuk 44:18 references the Medresh that explained Yehudah's opening statement to Yoseph as a veiled threat.

"If you (Yoseph) ignore my questions I will kill both you and your master (Pharaoh)."

If Yehudah was prepared to fight for Binyamin and the integrity of the family, why did he allow the family to return to Mitzrayim? They had their food. The brothers were once again all together. They were already on their way out of Egypt. Why return to the center of the city? We can assume that Yoseph's palace guard was among the elite of Egypt's fighting forces and the availability of reinforcements much greater within the city than outside the city. Why didn't Yehudah simply escape when he had the chance?

Obviously there is much more to the story than what is recorded in the actual text. Yehudah and the brothers were not typical. They were not simply 11 brothers vying for place and fortune. They understood and accepted their individual and collective destinies as the Jewish people. Their emunah - belief and trust in Hashem, was absolute. They knew that G-d ran the universe and that they functioned within the circumscribed circumstances of His divine plan. At the same time they understood the nature of free will and their obligation to make decisions that furthered G-d's intentions. They were not free to sit back and let things happen. "You are not responsible to finish the work but neither are you exempt from doing your part of the job..." (Avos 2:16) In other words, they had to do the right thing and they were prepared to fight if need be. They accepted that "G-d is the Man of War" and that He controls the outcomes of all conflicts. Their success in battle would have nothing to do with numbers or preparation - whether inside the city or outside of the city. Whether a limited number of enemy soldiers or vast armies of them, G-d would decide the outcome. They fully trusted Hashem. Therefore, they did not fear returning to the city to confront the Viceroy's trumped up charges against Binyamin.

The question foremost in their minds was, why? Why was this happening to them? Why was this happening to Binyamin? The rest of them had participated in the sale of Yoseph and could accept that the events were a form of punishment. However, Binyamin was the innocent one. Binyamin had not been part of the conspiracy against Yoseph. Why was the Viceroy singling him out?

The greatness of the Brothers was their ability to see the directing hand of G-d in all things. Therefore, they were fearless in seeking out the truth. Knowing that Binyamin had not stolen the planted chalice, they had to confront Yoseph and finally find out the truth. Clearly, G-d was behind these events and their future and the future of humanity depended upon understanding His intentions.

From the start, the commentaries explained Yoseph's actions as desiring to facilitate a complete Teshuvah - repentance for his brothers. At the same time he would be able to ascertain whether they had grown to accept their collective destiny as the sons of Yakov. He would see if they would function as a single whole defending every part of the family as equally important to the whole, regardless of personal questions or bias.

At the same time, Yoseph did not want to be vindictive. He needed to be able to defend his actions as purely noble and well intended. It is obvious that the confrontation in this week's Parsha with Yehudah proved to Yoseph that he had accomplished what he had set out to do.

Yehudah willingly leads the family back to Yoseph in search of answers. The Viceroy's behavior from the start was bizarre.

"Why was the Viceroy of Egypt, second in power to Pharaoh, concerned about the family history of a group of merchants? Thousands of buyers were coming to Egypt on a daily basis to purchase food and supplies. Why did the great "Mashbir" himself care about our "Father and other siblings?" (44:18-19) We responded in a trusting and possibly foolish fashion. We told you that we had an elderly father and a younger brother. However, we also told you that our youngest brother was special to our father. We explained that his full-brother had died and that our father uniquely loved the remaining son from that wife. Yet, you betrayed our trust by demanding that we pain our aging father simply so that "you could set your eyes upon our youngest brother." (44:20-21)

After we explained to you that bringing our youngest brother to Egypt would be so painful to our Father that it might cause his death, you still insisted that we bring him! (44:22-23) Why? What possible reason did you have to put us through all that?

We then returned to Canaan and informed our Father about what had happened. Our Father decided to wait and see. Maybe the famine would end and we wouldn't have to return. However, in time we ran out of food and were forced to return. We reminded our Father that we had to bring Binyamin with us or you would refuse to sell us provisions. Understand that you caused our Father to relive the tragedy of his other son's death. More so than that, he knew that he was sending Binyamin into certain danger. You had already proven yourself to be untrustworthy by imprisoning Shimon and making ridiculous demands regarding Binyamin. Your intentions could not be trusted and he feared that some danger would befall Binyamin. (44:24-29)

(Note: Yakov may have also suffered tremendous guilt because he was the one who had sent Yoseph in search of his brothers from which he never returned! Imagine how he would feel if he sent Binyamin and something would happen to him?)

But now the worse has happened. If I should return to my Father without Binyamin he will never recover from the loss. I want you to know that I guaranteed Binyamin's safe return by putting my eternity on the line! Therefore, if you truly believe that Binyamin is guilty take me in his stead. I will be your slave and allow Binyamin to return to his Father. I cannot return to my Father without

Binyamin. I will not be witness to the pain that you will have caused!" (44:30-34)

The next verses in the Parsha describe Yoseph revealing his true identity. We must conclude that Yehudah's speech was the proof positive that Yoseph needed to fully forgive his brothers. What was it that convinced Yoseph of his brother's complete Teshuvah?

Yoseph had two objectives. 1. Facilitate complete Teshuvah for his brothers. 2. Do it in a way that would prove the nobility of his intentions rather than his anger and vindictiveness. The first became clear when all the brothers followed Yehudah back to confront Yoseph. It was "all for one and one for all." Regardless of the circumstances, they were a nation that cared as much about the one as they did about the whole. More so than that, Yehudah stated that he would not allow his Father to suffer any more than he had already suffered. The very concern and sensitivity for Yakov's pain that was missing when they sold Yoseph into slavery was now foremost in their minds.

Yoseph's second goal was also accomplished. By making Binyamin the focus of his irrational attack he proved that his intentions were noble. Had he focused his attention on any of the other brothers they could have accused him of anger and vindictiveness. However, Binyamin was the only innocent one! Yoseph had no cause to be angry with him. Therefore, he could honestly say to his brothers, "Do not be distressed. Do not reproach yourselves for selling me. G-d sent me here to provide for the family..." (45:5)

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